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Mark Badams @ Lysenko Soviet Union

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5 August 1974

Dr. Joshua Lederberg  
Center for Advanced Study in the  
Behavioral Sciences  
202 Junipero Serra Boulevard  
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

While I was chatting with Michael Lerner at Berkeley a couple of weeks ago, he mentioned that you had written him requesting information on the reception of your work in the Soviet Union. He had been kind enough to read a manuscript of a book which I am just completing which contains a discussion of Soviet microbial genetics, and he asked me to respond to your inquiry.

Having discussed the matter with Lerner, we agreed that the best immediate response to your request would be to send you the third chapter of my manuscript, "Emergence of Molecular Biology", and to draw your attention especially to pp. 87-97, where your name appears in a couple of places. My goal in this particular section is to determine why Soviet microbiology was very slow and conservative in responding to Western work in microbial genetics, and what relation this conceptual lethargy had, if any, to Lysenkoism.

As the chapter suggests, it would appear that Lysenkoism alone is not sufficient to explain the response. I have alluded to the resistance to new ideas coming from certain traditional viewpoints in microbiology, which had been entrenched in the microbiological "establishment" and slowed work in microbial genetics in part because of the centralized nature of Soviet research. The only exceptions which I find are Alikhanian (Institute of Antibiotics), Gershenzon (Ukrainian Institute of Microbiology), and Ryzhkov; all three, however, were really trained as geneticists and went into microbial work free from the usual disciplinary blinders. As the quotation from Lysenko makes clear, this resistance is not Lysenkoist; rather, there seems to have been a "united front" involving both Lysenkoists and traditional, conservative biologists whose arguments were different although they had the same policy implications vis-a-vis bacterial genetics.

cc: DAK

ADAMS, Hank

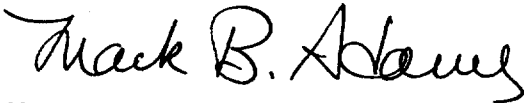
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I would be delighted to have your comments on the chapter. It was a little hard for me, totally immersed in the Soviet materials as I was, to estimate the breadth of resistance to the new approaches in the West. How characteristic were Hinshelwood and Chargaff? In hindsight, they appear to be something of a lunatic fringe. But my historical sense leads me to suspect that they might have been the visible tip of an iceberg. Any comments you can make along these lines would be terribly helpful.

Unfortunately, our department has no xeroxing funds. Do you suppose that you could have the chapter xeroxed and send it back? I feel embarrassed making such a request, but I have only a few copies of the MS and will need this in making my revisions.

I am sorry that I missed you at the Institute, where I spent a day in early July. Arnold Thackray has arrived here safely. Please give my best regards to Robert Merton and Harriet Zuckerman.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark B. Adams". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Mark B. Adams  
Bers Assistant Professor